

Philippians 3: [12] Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

1. Following

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after."

A. Accurate Assessment

Paul, one of the greatest men that ever lived outside of Jesus Christ states that he lacks something in his life.

Paul has probably been saved some 30 years but he is not satisfied with his present spiritual condition. He is aware of his need for further spiritual growth and development.

* If you are satisfied with your present spiritual condition, you will not sense the need to grow.

Thus Paul is evaluating his Christian walk.

He realized there are some goals that remained untouched, some paths that had not yet been walked.

B. Absent of Attainment

Don't misunderstand.

Paul has ALL he needs "in Christ Jesus."

2 Cor 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God

The "lack" here, "*not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect,*" is not on Christ's part, but Paul's!

The word "**attained**" is "lambano," which is "to take hold of" something in order to "seize" it!

There are levels of Christian experience that Paul feels he has not yet "caught or seized."

He has higher mountains to climb! Deeper valleys to explore! Greater lessons to learn!

C. Absolute Achievement

Paul says he is not "**already perfect**."

The word "**perfect**" is "teleios" which means reaching the end or complete maturity.

Paul admits there are some levels of maturity had not yet been reached!

Not that he isn't a mature Christian, but that he is short of the spiritually mature Christian he desires to be.

* Perfection is a goal not an achievement.

* If you know you have a long way to go in the Christian life, or maybe even having failed recently, take heart!

On the other hand, if you're thinking about how "mature" you are in the Christian walk, think again dear friend!

If the man who said, "For me to live is Christ," still has much ground to cover, so do we!

Philippians 1:21

D. Active Ambition

Paul admits his lack, but then he writes "*I follow after.*"

Paul is not just going to sit around and do nothing to improve. Paul is going to follow. To "*follow*" is "dioko de" which is to "eagerly pursue." It is to run after in order to catch. Jesus said "*take up your cross and follow me.*"

It is a runner eagerly pressing forward focused on the finish line.
It is to be so focused that one is not distracted by obstacles or other runners.

To follow is a powerful verb which expresses intense craving. Paul has a spiritual hunger for more of Jesus.

E. Apprehended to Apprehend

"That I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended for Christ Jesus."

To "*apprehend*" is "katalambano" which is to lay hold of so as to make it ones very own, to possess, comprehend. The Lord Jesus apprehended Paul, that day on the Damascus Road in Acts 9, Paul was saved! Saved by the Grace of God!

1 Timothy 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

Paul says that he was "*apprehended*" of Christ Jesus!
Apprehended also means "to gain control of someone through pursuit."
The Lord Jesus "apprehended" Paul. The Lord "overtook" him, "captured" him and "arrested" him.
If He ever does "apprehend" you, you'll never forget it!
It does not take thirty years to get saved! And once a person is saved ... he is saved!

Listen to Amos describing the call to preach.

Amos 7:14-15 "Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: and the Lord TOOK me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."

The Lord Jesus "*apprehended*" Paul for a purpose.
Therefore Paul desired to achieve the purposes for which Christ "apprehended" him.
Simply stated Paul is saying "my will is His will."

* An Olympic athlete is selected or chosen to represent his country.
The goal for the Olympic athlete is to win the gold; which is why they were chosen.
The athlete is given a coach, put through rigorous training and practices to develop and improve skills.
The athlete is not sent to start the race, but to finish it.

Paul was apprehended to know and share the love and grace of God, Ephesians 3:18.

Philippians 3: [13] Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

Paul says "**Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.**"

Paul says "Brethren", meaning from the same birth channel or womb.
We are brothers and sisters through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says, I am running toward a goal of spiritual maturity and I have not reached the finish line.
Paul says I have not arrived yet, I have not become what I desire to be.
Then he says as I am running, "**this one thing I do.**"

It is better to say "this one thing I do" than these 40 things I dabble in.

David, "the man after God's Own Heart," testified in **Psalms 27:4**, "**ONE THING have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.**" This is David's "one thing." Hunger for God! Life-long worship! The New Testament would have said, "Abiding in Christ."

Jesus' "one thing" statement, focused on fellowship with God! "**And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but ONE THING is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.**" **Luke 10:41-42**

Paul wrote for us his "**one thing**" statement.

"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before."

The word "**forget**" is a conscious refusal to let past obstacles consume our attention or hinder us.
To "**forget**" is to cease to be affected by.

What is Paul forgetting? Those things which are behind. Those things that are in the past.
For a runner, "looking back" breaks our stride, we lose our balance, drift off course and it hinders our progress.

In **Numbers 11:5-6**, the Israelites in "looking back" failed to trust God in the present and for the future.
[5] We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: [6] But our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

A. Past Sin

Some are hounded, haunted and hampered by the past.
Luke 7:47-50 "Thy sins are forgiven.....Go in peace."

We are to put our sin under the blood of Jesus and it is forgiven.
If God forgives us, then we are forgiven!

Psalms 103: [12] As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Jeremiah 31:34 I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more

Others may have sinned against you, and we are to forgive them.

Matt 18:21-22 "How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?.....Until seventy times seven."

Mark 11:26 "If ye will not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Friend if God forgives someone, do we ask more than God out of others?

B. Past Sorrows

Many are bound, bitter and burdened by past sorrows.

Paul had many trials, disappointments and hardships. The devil would try to cause sorrows to bring bitterness.

2 Cor 11:[24] Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. [25] Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; [26] In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; [27] In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. [28] Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

Maybe death has come into your family, but God has sent you grace for every need.

C. Past Successes

Many are prideful of past accomplishments and achievements.

Paul had much to be proud of:

Phil 3:4-6 [4] Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: [5] Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; [6] Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Paul had the privilege of founded many churches upon the sure foundation of Christ.

But Paul knew that victories and failures are in the past.

Psalms 118: [24] This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

* If the past is not dealt with, it will deal with you.

The past is a rudder to guide you, not an anchor to drag you.

Philippians 3: [14] I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

3. Forwarding

"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before."

A. The Goal He Saw

The verb "**reaching forth**" is to lean forward, stretching and extending one's self, trying to lay hold of the goal!

We are running a race and Paul is leaning toward the finish line and concentrating on the goal.

Hebrews 12:[1] Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Paul says " ***I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*** "

To "**press**" is to earnestly pursue, strive after or chase. it is a bearing down.
Paul was pressing forward not stressing backward.

Yogi Berra said "if you don't know where you are going, you will end up some place else."

Because Paul was pressing forward he could be a help to Silas, Timothy, Titus.
Paul didn't stumble over the jail cell experience, he led the jailor to the Lord.
He has been a help to me.
When the viper bit Paul in Acts 28, Paul shook it off and felt no harm.

B. The Glory He Sought

Paul said "***I press toward the mark.***"

The noun "**mark**" is "skopos," which is "a goal, an end line, the finishing point,"
That mark is complete surrender to Jesus. It is to be like Jesus!

The Spirit warned Paul about the bonds and afflictions of returning to the prison. But hear what Paul said about obstacles "***But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, SO THAT I MIGHT FINISH MY COURSE with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.***"

Paul mentioned "***the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.***"

The "**prize**" is the victors crown for faithfully finishing the race.

2 Timothy 4: [7] I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

This "**high calling**" is owned or possessed by God and is given only for those who are saved "***in Christ Jesus.***"

The term "Anoklesis" means "an invitation from above!" Paul might be referring to the day he was saved, that "heavenly calling or vision." Also he could have the Rapture in mind. If ever an "upward calling" existed, that's it!

Concl: Paul was pursuing the prize, running the race and seeking the goal.

* In 1905 a young man from a wealthy family entered Yale University. His family intended that after completing his degree he would enter a suitable career in America. But God gripped his heart with the needs of China and he volunteered to go to that country with the gospel, much to the dismay of his family and friends.

He left America but never made it to China, succumbing to a disease before reaching that distant shore. After his death, a note was found in his Bible that summarized his life: "No reserves. No retreats. No regrets." I wonder how many of us could say the same thing?

* Three days before reaching the New World, the great explorer, Christopher Columbus, was approached by his uneasy and unhappy crew. They begged him to turn back, for none of them had seen land for thirty-one days. Their provisions were running low, the voyage was a nightmare to nowhere, and they were afraid if they went much farther they'd be unable to catch enough wind to return to Spain before running out of food and water. Columbus had one word for his faltering men: ***Adelante! Adelante!—Onward! Onward!***

* Chariots of Fire, a great 1981 movie and it gives us the story of Olympic runner Eric Liddell who won a bronze medal for the 200-meter and a gold for the 400-meter race as he ran for Scotland. After that he went to be a missionary. Interestingly, back in the 1924 Olympics he refused to run his best event, the 100-meter dash because it was being held on a Sunday. Because of that he was accused of being unpatriotic and legalistic. But he stood his ground, he stood strong and would not give in and God honored that in his life. In fact, he entered the 400-meter dash, which was not held on a Sunday, the Lord's Day and even though it was not his best event he won a gold medal!

But one year before this event there was another race that played out like some Hollywood movie. When the gun went off and the race started, Liddell tangled his feet with J. J. Gillies of England and he went tumbling to the ground. He sat there dazed for a moment, not knowing whether he could get up, when the official screamed, "Get up and run!"

So he jumped to his feet and took off after the pack, which was now a full twenty yards ahead of him. In a quarter mile, that's a big distance to try to make up. In his unorthodox style of running he took off after the pack. He pulled into fourth place ten yards behind the leader, J. J. Gillies.

With forty yards to go, he pulled into third place, then second. And right at the tape he passed Gillies as he stuck out his chest and won the race! He then collapsed on the track in total exhaustion. Medical personal had to assist him off the track that day, but he finished the race and he won!